

W 84250
May 1928

POLITICIAN OR DIPLOMATIST ?

The peaceful operation and the universal recognition of the XIX Amendment of our Constitution no longer commands the attention of the public. The hectic days of platform oratory are of the past. Universal suffrage has successfully met the challenge and women have adjusted themselves to the right of franchise more universally and intelligently than the most sanguine of supporters of woman suffrage had dared to hope.

Yet in face of these facts, it might be of interest to hear of the initial ^{event}, be it of a politician or diplomatist, that gave to the women of the Territory of Wyoming the right to vote, for it was in that territory at its first legislature in 1869 that unlimited franchise came to the women of Wyoming.

During the early days of the operation of the Union Pacific Railway into the West there came to Wyoming, from Peru, Illinois, a mother with husband and three sons. Wyoming was then largely an unknown and untried western frontier. The frontier woman's destination, South Pass City, was to be reached only by stage after leaving the railroad. To this gold mining camp situated in the thin fringe of civilization in the early days of the year 1869, came Esther Hobart Morris, bringing with her a breath of freedom, democracy and equality, her inspiration ^{largely} based on the eloquent and forceful appeals made by Susan B. Anthony for "equal suffrage." These convincing appeals had been heard and absorbed by Mrs. Morris after hearing Mrs. Anthony in New York and Illinois.

Into this remote mining camp of South Pass, hundreds of miles removed from railroads, surrounded by the crafty redmen, the highway robber and the howling wolves and crying coyotes, came "the mother of woman suffrage for Wyoming." Mrs. Morris had an original style and out of the common order of conversational speech. Her son once said that his mother's abundant store of genial wit carried her through many a trying situation; she had courage to do what would have been easier to avoid; she

scorned the static position adopted by the average woman; she was dynamic; she talked plain Anglo-Saxon--so easy of understanding.

In this typical mining camp were a handful of those who enjoyed enjoyed and relished conversation around the snapping pine-know open fire of the log cabin of Mrs. Morris, discussions and debates on questions that gave to Mrs. Morris the inspiration that grew from a dream into a reality, that of the franchise of women.

In September 1869, there was to be held in the mountain city of South Pass an election for members to the Territorial Legislature. A few days prior to this election, Mrs. Morris gave a dinner at her home, the table filled with wild game and relished personally prepared. To this feast were bidden forty men and women. Among these guests were Captain William Bright from Maryland, and Captain Herman G. Nickerson, opposing officers in the Civil War, and both candidates for the same legislative position in the Territorial Senate. After the repast, while lingering around the unemptied table, Mrs. Morris arose, confessing to the strategy of the gathering. "There are present," she ventured to state, "two opposing candidates for the first legislature of our new Territory, one of whom is soon to be elected, and we desire here and now to receive from them a public pledge that whomsoever is elected will introduce and work for the passage of an act conferring upon the women of our new Territory the right of suffrage."

Both of the candidates solemnly pledged themselves to the request, receiving the applause of all present. There were no Republicans elected anywhere in new Wyoming at the first election, the Democrat, Colonel Bright, being the choice of the people.

True to his promise, William Bright introduced a bill in the Legislature in October 1869, a bill which became a law in December 10th, granting to Wyoming women "equal suffrage," a right which has continued to them from that date to the present day. Thus Wyoming became the first state

or commonwealth in the world to grant to women unrestricted franchise.

Was the toothsome dinner the psychological cause of the final result, or was the ultimate outcome of the appeal for suffrage due to the eloquence of the hostess? Was Mrs. Morris a diplomat or a politician?

GRACE RAYMOND HEBARD
University of Wyoming

26
928